Transcript
The Nature of Ethics of William Lily

Ordinary conversation. We often hear such statement as he ought not to have done this. It is a good thing to help one's neighbors. He's thoroughly a good man. His character is bad. He was only doing his duty, or it's always right to speak the truth. When such statements are made, they are frequently.
Contradicted by someone hearing them, and this by itself suggests that they are not as simple as the as at first sight they appear to be. If a friend disagrees with my statement that Smith is a thoroughly a good man, he may do so for one of two reasons.
A. He may know facts about Smith's behaviour, which are unknown to me, and he tells me these facts and convinces me that they are true. I shall then be ready to admit that Smith is is in some respect not a good man.
B. It may be the case, however, that my friend and I both know the same facts about Smith, and yet I continue to hold that Smith is thoroughly good, while my friend considers him to be bad. Now we are using the words good and bad with different meanings and until we come to.
Some agreement as to their meanings. We are not likely to agree in our opinion of Smith. This is just the kind of question with which ethics deals, that is the true meaning of such words as good and right and ought, which are used so commonly in everyday conversation.
When we come to an agreement as 10 as to the meaning of such words, other questions will arise. We may ask whether it is possible for us to know whether Smith is good or bad. We may ask on what grounds Smith should give up.
These activities which you have agreed to call bad and should engage in those which we agree to call good. All these and many other similar questions are within the scope of ethics.
We may define ethics as the normative science of the conduct of human beings living in societies, a science which judges this conduct to be right or wrong, so be good or bad, or in some similar way. This definition says, first of all, that ethics is a science, and science may be.
Find as a systematic and more or less complete body of language about a particular set of related events or subject. In this account of science, the important word is systematic. Scientific knowledge differs from the ordinary.
Haphazard knowledge of uneducated people in being arranged in a

definitive, coherent system. A science also aims at providing as complete and knowledge of its subject matter as it can, although in the present state of knowledge, no science is perfect in this respect.
Same time, the science may leave out details that he knows in order to give a simpler and clearer presentation of the important connections of the facts which he studies. It is generally agreed that a piece of knowledge cannot be regarded as scientific until it is accepted by those who are learning.
Learned in the particular science concerned in medicine, for example, the new cures which are so convincingly advertised cannot be regarded as scientific until they have been recognized as effective by capable doctors.
Finally, the sphere of science is limited to one set of the facts or objects. Deals with all the facts known about the universe. To deal with the universe as a whole is the work of metaphysics or philosophy, which is not a science. Each science has its own particular sphere. Botany deals with plants, psychology with minds and ethics with certain judgments that we make.
About human conduct, the sciences which are studied in the laboratories of our universities are descriptive or positive sciences. Positive sciences describe objects or phenomena as we observe them with our eyes and other sense organs. So in the case of mental processes like desiring and willing as we observe them by.
Introspection or looking inside our minds. Phenomenon is just the technical term for anything that can be observed in this way. There is in a positive science, no question or of judgment. Judging is object in any way. If the botanist judges a certain plant to be good or bad, or even to be beautiful or ugly, he is no longer doing the work of a botanist whose business it is.
To describe what he observes without judging either its real reality or its value, the psychologist describes the mental process like intention and willing, which lead to human conduct. But as psychologist, he has no concern with the goodness or badness of that conduct.
There is a group of sciences, however, which do not deal directly with observed facts, but which deal as systematically and completely as is possible with the standards or rules or norms or criteria by which we judge certain objects.
And these sciences are called normative sciences. Aesthetics, for example, deals systematically with the standards by which we judge objects of perception, commonly sights and sounds, to be beautiful or ugly. Logic deals with the standards by which we judge statements to be

true or false and.
Ethics deals with the standards by which we judge human actions to be right or wrong. The normative sciences differ from the positive sciences in one more way. They do not merely describe the standards by which we judge. They are also concerned with the validity or truth of these standards in ethics.
It.
Not enough to describe the rules by which men have tested their conduct, such as the Ten Commandments of the Hebrews. We also ask in ethics why these rules are valid, or on what grounds we ought to observe them. Ethics has been defined as the normative science of conduct, and conduct is a collective name.
For voluntary actions in common speech, we judge many things other than human actions to be good or bad. We speak, for example, of good wine and bad luck. The words good and bad are used ambiguously in ordinary speech. A single science may be required to deal with them in.
All their various meanings and to distinguish these meanings from one another, and such a science is sometimes called axiology or the science of values.
We shall see later that one ethical theory holds that we mean by calling an action right or good is that it leads to a result which is good in one of the various senses of good. And if this theory be accepted, a study of ethics would require to be completed by a.
Study of axiology. At the outset, however, it will keep things more clear if we continue, if we confine ethics to the study of human conduct and leave the axiology, the study of other things that can be called good or bad.
Conduct does not.
Include those human activities, like the circulation of the blood over, which most normal people have no control, but it includes all voluntary actions. A voluntary action is an action that a man could have done differently if he had no if he has so chosen. One reaction includes.
All willed or violational actions in which there is a conscious process of willing, like the action of a student matriculating in a university. Voluntary actions also include certain actions where there may be no conscious process of willing at all, provided that.
The doer could have prevented or changed the action by choosing to do so. A habitual action like the child sucking of his thumb or even a reflects action like blinking in a strong light may be voluntary, although the doer of these actions may not be thinking about them at all.
But attending to them and choosing could have done these actions

differently or refrained from doing them at all. And so they must regard. They must be regarded as voluntary. Sometimes people try to excuse their wrong actions.
By saying that these actions were not deliberately willed or chosen as when a man continues a dishonest business practice of his predecessor without thinking about it, the question for ethic is not whether such a action was deliberately willed, but whether the doer could have prevented it by taking.
Thought about it. If he could have prevented it, the action can certainly be judged to be right or wrong action, although we may admit that its degree of righteousness or wrongness may be affected by its deliberateness.
Conduct may include inward activities like motives and desires.
As well as outward activities like speech and movements of the doer's limbs. And so these also will fall within the sphere of ethics. We so commonly think of these as causing outward bodily movement that we forget that they too are activities and liable to be judged.
Good or bad, even apart from the outward movements they produce, our provisional definition has limited the conduct with which we deal in ethics in two ways. We deal with human actions and not with the actions of lower animals.
It may be admitted that there is something like human goodness about a dog's loyalty to its master, but psychologists are so far from agreeing as to whether any of the actions of the lower animals are voluntary in the sense given to this word in the.
Last paragraph that it would be unwise to add our complications by including animal activities within the limits of our subject. A more arbitrary limitation is that of confining ethics to the study of the conduct of human beings living in societies. Some moralists would.
Indeed, go further and hold that the standards of ethics only apply to the relations of men with one another. The conduct studied in ethic is not only conduct done in society, but conduct that a focus some other member or members of that society.
It is worth, while including a reference to society in our definition, to remind ourselves that if it were not for his social background, a human being would not be a real human being capable of right and wrong actions.
Aristotle expressed this by saying he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a God.
Robinson Crusoe's conduct in the solitude of his desert island. Maybe he

still judged good or bad, but according to this view, these terms would obtain their meaning from the social environment in which Crusoe had lived.
Before he found himself in an uninhabited island, and to which there was always a hope that he might return. It may be for some purposes convenient to include in a single normative science the standards by which we judge all human activities, including those that appear to have. No effects on other people or relations with them, and it is difficult to think of another name that ethics for such a science. Yet common usage would certainly make a social activity like speaking the truth more directly the concern of ethics than a purely private.
Activity with no marked social effects like stamp collecting or religious activity like fasting. Of course, such activities do have indirect social effects. The man who is fasting cannot share his food with a visitor and so far his action would be judged.
By the standards of ethics, this limitation is one that may have to be given up on a fuller study of ethics. But in the beginning we shall find it an advantage to emphasize the social background of the moral life, and to confine the activities judged in ethics to choose.
For those done with normal human background of social institutions and social relationships.
Yeah.
There are several terms commonly used in judging human actions by ethical standards. We say that an action is good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral. We say that we ought to do an action, that we should do it, or that it is our duty to do it. And another kind of action we say that we ought not to do.
We should not do it, or it is our duty not to do it. Of these terms, good and good and bad are probably the most common, but they are also the most troublesome in the 1st place. They are used ambiguously in common speech. Not only are good.
Works done by the players, but the troublemaker enjoys a good fight, and the successful burglar marks a good howl from the safe, which he has robbed. In fact, the word good, as commonly used, merely indicates an attitude of mind in favor of the object or event to which the term good is.
Applied and nothing more, so that I thought that almost anything may be termed good. If anyone finds himself in favor of its existence, Even so, even to a very limited degree, the ordinary man seems to distinguish such a loose sense of good.
From a more definitely moral sense. But even about the moral sense,

there is a great deal of ambiguity. We certainly think of morally good conduct not merely as that towards which men feel a favorable attitude. It is in some sense conduct worthy of arousing such a favorable attitude. Or conduct that ought to arouse such an attitude. This is sometimes expressed by saying that we call a conduct good. We are approaching it from the standpoint of value, but surely value has just the same meaning as goodness in the widest axiological use of that.
Term is convenient in ethics to use the words good or bad of an action when we are thinking of the action as leading to consequences which are good or bad in some sense of these very ambiguous terms, for example. Consequences which satisfy our desires, but this limitation is hardly in accord with common views. The whole range of the meanings of good will have to be considered when we come to those ethical theories which regard the goodness or rightness.
Of an action as depending upon its power of producing good results. The words right and wrong have no such references to consequences, the use of actions that are in some way fitting to their circumstances.
As when we say that a person said or did the right thing in an interview, the fittingness of a right action often appears to consist in its conformity to some rule, and the view that the moral life is a matter of obeying rules is a very common one. We think of an action.
As before a judge, when he has passed his judgment, it is called right. There are, however, other uses of right than the moral one. We use it commonly in aesthetic judgments, such as this is the right kind of hat to go with distress, or the word is just right in this line of the poem in this. In aesthetic use, right also suggests fittingness to circumstances, but here this fittingness is an aesthetic one. The word right sometimes suggests that the action referred to is in some way obligatory. The doer or other people feel that he ought to do it.
This is not always the case. It is right for a man to feel regret when his mother-in-law leaves his house.
But no one could say that he ought to do so if his feelings are not under his control. This sense of obligatory reason is, however, definitely implied in the phrases he ought to do this, or it is his duty to do this, and it is one factor which influences the doer in doing or not doing.
Action.
Such a judgment of oddness or duties very different from the judgment of goodness. We might all agree to say that it is good to eat ice cream on a very hot day, but no one would seriously say that we ought to eat ice cream or that it is our duty to eat ice cream or on a hot day because we

do not feel any of.
Obligation to do so, unless we wish it may be suggested that.
What distinguishes an action which we ought to do from one that is merely right, is that when we ought to do an action, the action is not only right, but there are motives and inclinations in the mind of the doer which would hinder his doing it. We can say that.
A patient ought to take his daily dose of quintin quinine, because the unpleasant taste of the medicine makes him strongly disinclined to do so.
It is possible.
Well, more than one action to be right. At the same time, it may be equally right for me to drink coffee or to drink tea at breakfast. It may be equally right for me to study economics or to study history in university course. In such case, we cannot say that I ought to drink coffee or that it is my duty to drink tea or that I ought to study.
Economics or that it is my duty to study history. These phrases imply that.
There is one and only one action which is right for me at the moment. If it is my duty now to study history, then no other action would be right at this moment. So that to study economics would be wrong for me, of course, in a rather more.

Way of speaking, I may be able to say that it is my duty to study either history or economics, but this would again imply that to study mathematics, at least on this particular occasion, would be wrong. The words ought and duty certainly apply only to right actions, but they suggest if not implying.
Certain other things about these right actions a that they are obligatory on a particular individual, that there are tendencies in the mind of the doer making him this inclined to them.
That one and only one action is right at a particular moment. While these appear to be the distinction in common speech in the use of ethical terms, it is to be remembered that there may be a difference of emphasis or even.
Meaning in the use of such terms by different persons, some like Kant, we feel a sense of awe in the presence of the statement that a certain action is a man's duty, or that he ought to do it.
But the moral judgment may arouse no such feeling in another man. The business of the student of ethics is to try to reach meanings which will be generally accepted by educated people, and also to limit these meanings so that the terms will be free from ambiguity.
And our use of them free from inconsistency. Yet we are not likely to

attain this in ethics for ethical terms, unlike the technical terms of the sciences are words in common use on men's lips.
Are liable to constant change in emphasis and meaning.